Appendix 2

Medway Council
Serving You

Medway Town Centres Strategy

October 2022

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Executive Summary

Medway's town centres sit in the heart of communities. Each town centre is unique, and this distinctiveness reflects the varied roles and functions they fulfil for residents, workers, students and visitors to Medway.

Medway's town centres are home to many thriving businesses, as well as some treasured buildings and places to shop, eat, drink, work and enjoy. There are countless local success stories, which should be celebrated. However, the needs of those who use Medway's town centres are changing and wider social, economic and technological drivers have, over time, created challenges for the retail-focused town centres of Medway.

Within this context, Medway's town centres need to celebrate their distinctiveness and unlock their potential to catalyse their renewal. The council's core economic development and regeneration strategy, *Medway 2037,* acknowledges this and now includes town centres as one of its central six priorities. This Town Centres Strategy sets out the vision, rationale, and overarching strategic priorities for Medway's town centres and aligns to *Medway 2037's* three cross-cutting themes of *growth for all, innovation* and *net zero transition*.

Medway Council, in collaboration with partners, proposes a clear vision for Medway's town centres:

The Vision for Medway's Town Centres

To create a prosperous, attractive, vibrant and sustainable waterfront city centre for Chatham and the town centres of Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham in complementary, unique ways that embrace distinctiveness and enable growth for all.

To create diverse, inclusive, demand-led shopping, leisure, living and working environments and experiences for residents and visitors; support businesses to flourish, create, innovate, and enable an increasingly productive economy alongside improvements in the the quality of life for Medway's residents.

Individual visions for Chatham, Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham have also been developed, with further detail provided in this strategy.

Key overarching priorities have been identified to realise the Town Centres Strategy and vision, as well as secure funding and investment opportunities as they arise in the future. These priorities include the importance of collaborative and multi-agency partnership

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working, including Kent Police and National Health Service (NHS). This partnership approach will be adopted going forward to co-design and co-develop a future Town Centres Delivery Plan.

The Town Centres Strategy's overarching priorities are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1:

Overarching priorities	Description
Take a place-based approach to delivery	• Delivering successful town centres requires place-based thinking and delivery. This will bring together services across Medway Council to align policy and delivery priorities focused on places together with consideration of projects and interventions which cut across thematic lines.
Develop a strong vision and narrative that celebrates the individuality of each town centre, but that unites them under a common goal, which directly informs what is delivered	• Understand the role of each town centre and its offer for Medway with delivery plans which reflect this distinctiveness. • Challenge perceptions of our town centres to celebrate their individual characters, assets, businesses and communities to demonstrate that they are inclusive places for all – both Medway's existing communities and for visitors.
Balance pragmatism with aspiration	• Identify projects and interventions at all scales – small-scale, short-term and with good prospects for delivery and breadth of impact; and larger-scale, longer-term projects which will require partnership working and funding to be delivered. • Acknowledge that large-scale capital funded schemes are important but are reliant on funding, investment, council delivery and support and are longer-term in nature
Support the growth and diversification of businesses and uses in our town centres	• Provide the right types of spaces and environments that are conducive to supporting diversification and growth across a diverse range of sectors and uses. • Support businesses in adapting to new ways of working, new technology and the net-zero agenda.
Develop the supporting partnership structures needed to let our town centres flourish	• Develop effective and meaningful relationships between the council, community groups and Town Centre Forums, to help them – in partnership – design, facilitate, deliver and manage change in town centres. • Ensure that communities are genuinely engaged in this process to help shape and deliver change. • Maximise the council's ability to directly deliver projects and initiatives as well as work in partnership with others in varying forms (resourcing, funding etc) in addition to building capacity of external stakeholders to deliver.

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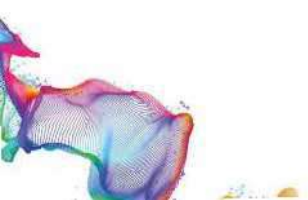

Overarching priorities	Description
Make town centres places that everyone can access and benefit from	• Improve the safety of town centres, tackling concerns around crime and anti-social behaviour. • Ensure town centres are child-friendly environments where young people feel safe, protected, valued and included. • Build the hospitality and night-time offer, encouraging more students and visitors to use our town centres.
Ensure our town centres respond to the net zero agenda and benefit from innovation	• Provide high-quality pedestrian and cycle infrastructure and encourage more active methods of transport. • Support the creative re-use of existing built assets. • Encourage the digitalisation of our high streets and businesses.
Support the delivery of improved outcomes for all of Medway's town centres	• Build on the platform of successes in securing public funding and delivering transformational projects more focused around Chatham, Rochester and Strood to ensure that future delivery and investment is distributed.

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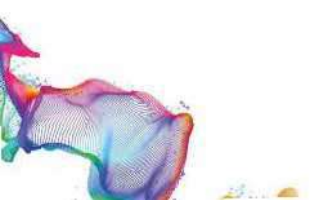

Introduction

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on town centres across the UK has been profound, and Medway is no exception. Prolonged and repeated public health restrictions accelerated the growth of online retailing and amplified the already challenging trading conditions for many of Medway's town centre businesses. Some of these immediate impacts could well have longer-lasting impacts. Whilst this clearly creates challenges for more traditional high-street retailing, this also means there are opportunities to innovate, create and do things differently. Indeed, whilst larger format retailing has experienced significant challenges in Medway's town centres, a number of independent high-street businesses were also launched during this time breathing life into Medway's town centres in the face of unprecedented circumstances.

This opportunity to deliver meaningful change is timely in the face of the climate emergency. Medway's town centres will play a key role in supporting more sustainable ways of living and working, a key part of the response to climate change.

Within this context the council is prioritising its town centres, to celebrate their distinctiveness, to unlock their potential and to catalyse their renewal. The council's core economic development and regeneration strategy, *Medway 2037,* now includes town centres as one of its central six priorities. This Town Centres Strategy sets out the vision, rationale and strategic priorities for Medway's Town Centres and aligns to Medway *2037's* three cross-cutting themes of *growth for all, innovation* and *net zero transition* as well as other key council priorities including the creation of child-friendly places, supporting Medway's key economic sectors and enhanced public health outcomes.

The preparation of this strategy has entailed consultation with local stakeholders and listening to those already making a difference and delivering in Medway's town centres. Medway Council recognises that the most important people in this process are the communities, businesses, charities, workers and visitors who *are* Medway's town centres. The council recognises that success will be delivered only through working in partnership; and further recognises that partnership working will take differing forms depending on context. Accordingly, the vision and overarching priorities identify *how* Medway Council intends to deliver with, catalyse and build the capacity of key stakeholders *in partnership*.

This strategy focuses primarily on the principal town centres of Rochester, Chatham, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham to optimise the potential benefits which can be realised for the greatest number of people. However, the strategy does also recognise the importance of many smaller, centres across Medway which serve their local communities such as Twydall and Parkwood. In addition, significant growth is planned for the Hoo Peninsula, which will create a new local centre. Whilst this strategy is focused on Medway's existing town centres, it is anticipated that the overarching priorities. including a focus on partnership working and a

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place-based approach to delivery will, over time, be embedded into the emerging plans for the Hoo Peninsula.

Medway Council has had great success in attracting public funding from various sources – Levelling Up Fund, Getting Building Fund, Future High Streets Fund, High Street Heritage Action Zone funding – and the projects these investments will deliver are set to be transformative and catalytic in equal measure. However, this is only the start of the process. The council recognises that significant investment and support is required in *all* of Medway's town centres and the council is committed to unlocking transformative change across Medway.

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Overview of this Town Centres Strategy

This Town Centres Strategy follows the following structure:

- **Where are we now?** An overview of the national, regional and local context which provides the backdrop for this strategy.
- **Why are Medway's town centres important?** A summary of why Medway's town centres are so important to the health and prosperity of Medway now and in the future.
- **SWOT analysis –** analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of each of Medway's town centres as a platform for developing the proposed strategic approach and potential initiatives.
- **The Strategy** -
  - Approach – an overview of the strategy's structure and key principles.
  - The vision for Medway's town centres – An overarching proposed vision for Medway's town centres, supported by distinct and individual visions for each of the five principal town centres.
  - Achieving the vision: overarching priorities for Medway's town centres – defining overarching priorities applicable to all the town centres as the basis for shaping the Delivery Plan.
  - Realising the strategy – co-designing and co-delivering a future Town Centres Delivery Plan in partnership.

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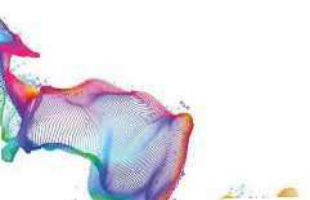

Where are we now?

Each of Medway's town centres is unique: a product of its history, local community and influenced by both local and wider factors. The last few years have been particularly challenging for town centres across the UK, including Medway. Covid-19 had deep and wide-ranging impacts for town centre businesses and users, which are still unfolding, and which have compounded an already difficult context for Medway's town centres. Businesses and their customers alike adapted to new ways of trading; there have been many positive examples from this period, new businesses springing up in response to opportunities, and existing businesses diversifying to become more resilient. However, undeniably recent years have been challenging for Medway's town centres and the council recognises that supporting their recovery and renewal needs to be a priority.

Wider Strategic Context

Given the challenges faced by high streets nationally, particularly in light of Covid-19 and wider trends and drivers impacting high streets, they have become an increasingly important focus of government policy. Key themes and context are captured below.

Levelling Up White Paper

The UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper (February 2022) sets out the evidence and the case for the levelling up of the UK, articulating the mix of factors required to transform places and boost local growth: *'strong innovation and a climate conducive to private sector investment, better skills, improved transport systems, greater access to culture, stronger pride in place, deeper trust, greater safety and more resilient institutions'*[1].

The rejuvenation and renewal of town centres is at the heart of this transformational aspiration and programme for change. The White Paper identifies that the drivers of spatial disparities can be conceptualised in six 'capitals':

- Physical capital – infrastructure, machines and housing.
- Human capital – the skills, health and experience of the workforce.
- Institutional capital - strong leadership and local governance, relationships between local government, businesses, communities and individuals.
- Intangible capital – innovation, ideas and patents.
- Financial capital – resources supporting the financing of companies.
- Social capital – the strength of communities, relationships and trust.

[1] UK Government (February 2022) *Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper*

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Importantly, rather than addressing the six capitals in isolation, the key to driving transformational change is the ability to address these drivers together in response to locally specific context.

The UK Government has defined a series of twelve missions to guide and measure the progress of the levelling up agenda. The missions and metrics span a range of areas from skills, health, wellbeing, crime, employment and productivity. Importantly, town centres are not only locations where outcomes and impacts related to the missions can be achieved in combination, but town centres are also explicitly acknowledged in Mission 9.

Levelling Up Mission 9 – Pride in Place

By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing

In the context of the implementation of this Town Centres Strategy, an ambition is to create town centres which Medway's residents, businesses and visitors can be proud of. This will be linked to delivering progress in all other areas – supporting skills, creating jobs, reducing crime and supporting wellbeing outcomes – but will be demonstrated through enhancing *pride in place.*

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) & Planning Practice Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (first adopted 2012 and updated in 2018, 2019 and 2021) and associated updates to the Planning Practice Guidance (principally updates in 2020) are important to consider in understanding the context around town centres.

The NPPF looks to ensure the vitality of town centres, with a view that planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.

The Planning Practice Guidance goes into further detail on the importance of town centres, with local planning authorities expected to take a leading role in promoting a positive vision for these areas, bringing together stakeholders and supporting sustainable economic and employment growth. Local authorities should consider structural changes in the economy, in particular changes in shopping and leisure patterns and formats, the impact these are likely to have on individual town centres, and how the planning tools available to them can support necessary adaptation and change.

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Planning Practice Guidance – 'What can a Town Centre Strategy contain?'

Insight from the Planning Practice Guidance, suggests that town centre strategies should be used to establish:

- A realistic role, function and hierarchy for town centres.
- A vision for the future of each town centre, including the most appropriate mix of uses to enhance overall vitality and viability.
- How a town centre can accommodate the scale of assessed need for main town centre uses.
- How existing land can be used more effectively, for example grouping particular uses such as retail, restaurant and leisure activities into hubs, or for converting airspace above shops.
- Opportunities for improvements to the accessibility and wider quality of town centres, including improvements to transport links and enhancement of the public realm.
- What complementary strategies are necessary to enhance the town centre and help deliver the vision for its future.
- The role different stakeholders can play in delivering the vision.
- Appropriate policies to address environmental issues facing town centres, including opportunities to conserve and enhance the historic environment.

Medway Council's emerging Local Plan seeks to deliver on the requirements of the NPPF and PPG in terms of establishing a policy framework to guide future development management decision-making; this Town Centres Strategy in turn sets out *how* the council proposes to *deliver* interventions to deliver on its planning policy and broader economic objectives.

Build Back Better High Streets (2021)

This document captures the government's vision for high streets, to deliver vibrant high streets where communities are at the heart of place-making; where a mix of commercial and residential uses complement each other; and where businesses large and small feel welcome. The five key priorities for high streets are:

1. ***Breathing new life into empty buildings*** – the government has ensured that the planning system supports a diverse mix of activity and businesses, with significant flexibilities added into the planning system (e.g., class E and a new permitted development right).
2. ***Supporting high street businesses*** – providing financial support through the business rates system (and business rates relief) and introducing new measures to

help businesses adapt and keep customers safe (e.g., pavement licences and temporary permission for off-sales of alcohol).

3. ***Improving the public realm*** – increasing investment in and designing green infrastructure which helps drive more footfall into town centres, which includes better provision for pedestrians and cyclists.
4. ***Creating safe and clean spaces*** – build and develop greener and cleaner high streets that will attract more visitors and make them feel safer and more welcome. This includes new litter bins, better enforcement and tackling crime and graffiti.
5. ***Celebrating pride in local communities*** – provide a new lease of life to high streets by encouraging local communities to celebrate and feel pride in their local high street, for instance by bringing back events and restoring historic buildings.

This Town Centres Strategy seeks to embed these five key priorities.

Medway Town Centres Policy Context

A significant amount of work has been led by Medway Council over the last two decades, including policy development, master planning and evidence based documents concerning Medway's town centres. A summary of these key documents is provided in the graphic below, with much of this insight used to inform the development of this Town Centres Strategy but recognising that the present-day context has changed significantly over the last twenty years.

Fundamentally, this Town Centres Strategy does not seek to replicate what has come before: for instance, the masterplans recently prepared for Chatham, Gillingham and Strood provide a sound platform for guiding longer-term development and regeneration proposals. Instead, this Town Centres Strategy sets out guiding principles and priorities for how the council will seek to deliver change at all scales in partnership with stakeholders, providing the principles and platform for a new way of working and engaging with communities, businesses and delivery partners to catalyse change.

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Figure 0-1: Medway Policy in relation to Town Centres

Medway Local Plan (2003)
Chatham Centre & Waterfront Development Framework – Supplementary Planning Guidance (2004)
Pentagon Development Brief (2005)
Chatham High Street/Best Street Area Masterplan (2010)
North Kent Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (2015)
North Kent Retail & Commercial Leisure Assessment (2016)
Chatham Placemaking Masterplan (2016)
Medway Retail & Commercial Leisure Assessment (2018)
Medway 2035 (2018)
Chatham, Gillingham & Strood Town Centre Masterplans (2019)
Medway 2037 & Town Centre Strategy (2022)

Currents Trends and Challenges Facing Town Centres Nationally

The role of the town centre has conventionally been oriented around retail as the primary land use. Whilst complementary uses such as restaurants, bars, leisure facilities and offices have always been part of the mix, most town centres have typically been defined and characterised by their retail offer and the sector's importance is clear: retail accounted for one-third of all addresses and a quarter of all jobs on British high streets as of March 2020[2].

The retail sector has faced increasing challenges and headwinds over recent years, many of which have been significantly accelerated and amplified by the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These overarching drivers of change and emergent trends are considered below:

- **Online retail** –there has been substantial growth in the sale of goods and services online, which was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The lockdowns and public health restrictions forced many retailers and their consumers to move online, resulting in a 30% growth in the value of online retail sales between 2019 and 2020 alone[3].
- **Changing patterns of living, working and consuming** – the Covid-19 pandemic forced many people to work from home for extended periods of time, and the reduction in out-commuting has been associated with increased spend in local town centres, particularly in areas like Medway. Emerging insight suggests that some form of working flexibility is

[2] ONS (March 2020)
[3] Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2021, Town Centre Regeneration; Available at https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9218/CBP-9218.pdf

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likely to remain in a post pandemic world, thus potentially having lasting impacts on town centres with changing demand for office and retail space.

- **Changing role and purpose of town centres** – town centres are no longer viewed solely as retail destinations but also places for leisure, entertainment, working and living. Increasingly, consumers prefer to spend their disposable income on an experience, rather than a physical product[4]. Having a diverse offering within town centres will support existing retail businesses and also make them more accessible for all members of the community.
- **High fixed costs (business rates and rent)** - business and retail representative groups have frequently stated that retail properties on the high street pay disproportionate sums in rental and business rates compared to properties of a similar physical size located elsewhere (e.g., out of town sites). This variation has been described as amounting to 'unfair competition' and has been attributed as a major cause of the struggle faced by high street retailers in recent years.
- **Fragmented ownership –** land ownership within town centres is frequently fragmented between multiple landowners ranging in scale and type from pension funds, insurance companies and public sector bodies to individual landlords. This fragmented ownership can often be a barrier to comprehensive asset management, placemaking or regeneration initiatives.

A combination of these identified drivers of change, amplified by the impact of Covid-19, underlying systemic challenges to town centre uses and national planning changes (policy and legislation) are having significant impacts on town centres and the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors across the UK. The Grimsey Review reported that there was a 42% drop in retail property investment between 2014 and 2018, and a 78% drop in shopping centre investment across the same period[5]; pre-pandemic 47% of retailers and 59% of pubs and clubs were characterised as being at significant risk of failure[6]. Since Covid-19, major high-street retailing and hospitality brands have been forced into extinction: Debenhams, the Arcadia Group, Oasis, Warehouse, Cath Kidston, Thorntons and Gap (amongst others) have all disappeared or been consolidated to a significant extent.

Recent Performance of Medway's Town Centres

Medway's town centres play an important role in Medway's economy, supporting 17% of all jobs in Medway. They have experienced similar trends to the national story over the past five years. This includes a diversification of the types of sectors present in towns and rising levels of vacancy.

[4] The Next Generation: The Future of Our Town Centres, Lichfields; Available at: the-next-generation-the-future-of-our-town-centres_sep-20.pdf (lichfields.uk)
[5] The Grimsey Review (2020) Build Back Better: Covid-19 Supplement for Town Centres
[6] The Grimsey Review (2020) Build Back Better: Covid-19 Supplement for Town Centres

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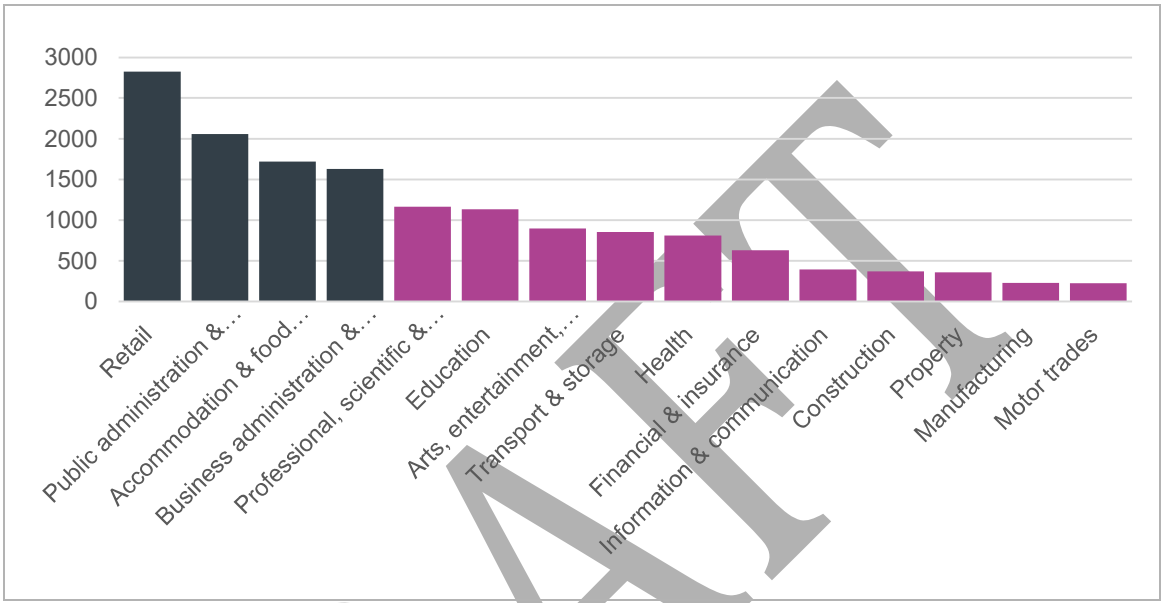
Employment data for the five town centres combined shows that the retail sector is the largest across all the towns, accounting for 18% of all employment. However, there is a diverse range of activity which sits behind this, with Medway's towns having strengths in public administration, accommodation and food services and the business administration and support sectors.

Figure 0-2: Amount of Employment (by sector) across Medway's Five Town Centres, 2020



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS, 2021

Employment data suggests that over the last five years, there has been a diversification of activities taking place in Medway's town centres, with a decline in the retail sector (3% CAGR loss between 2015 and 2020) being balanced out by growth in the professional, business support and the accommodation and food services sector.

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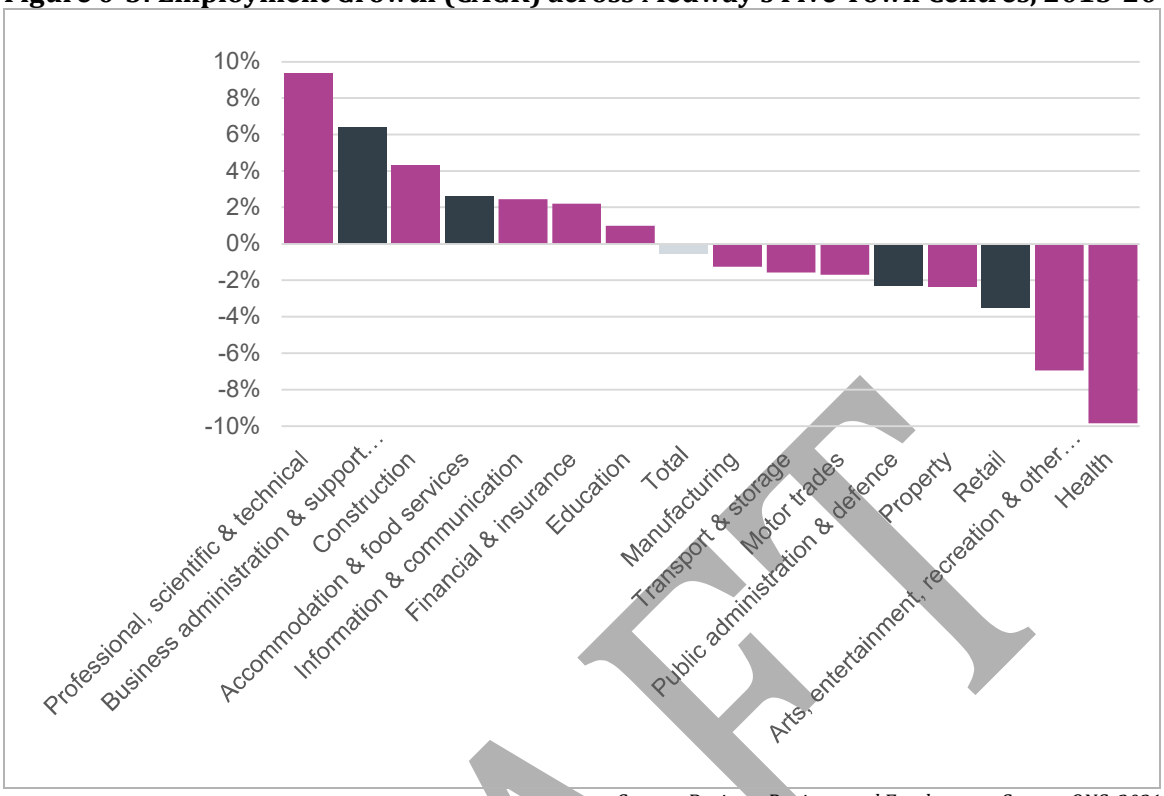
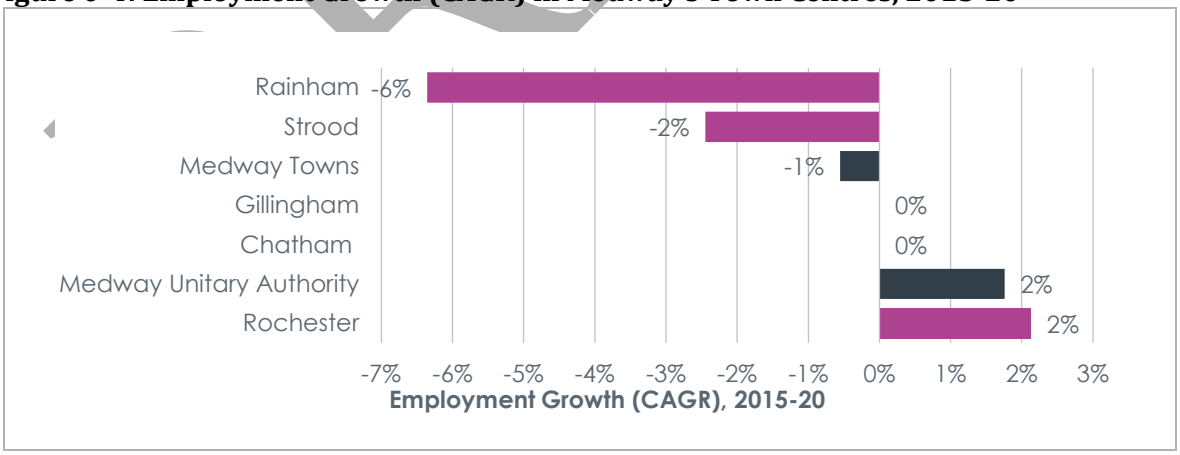
Figure 0-3: Employment Growth (CAGR) across Medway's Five Town Centres, 2015-20



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS, 2021

Out of Medway's five town centres, Rochester, has experienced the strongest employment growth over the last five years, rising by 2%. By comparison, employment in Rainham and Strood as a whole has declined over the same period.

Figure 0-4: Employment Growth (CAGR) in Medway's Town Centres, 2015-20



Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS, 2021

The performance of office and retail commercial property in Medway reflects a changing dynamic for town centres over the last few years, with rising levels of vacancy across the towns, exemplified through the recent closure of Debenhams on Chatham High Street. Whilst the overall retail vacancy rate is shown at c. 5%, this hides a more varied picture. For instance, the Centre for Cities High Streets Recovery Tracker indicates high street vacancy in Chatham

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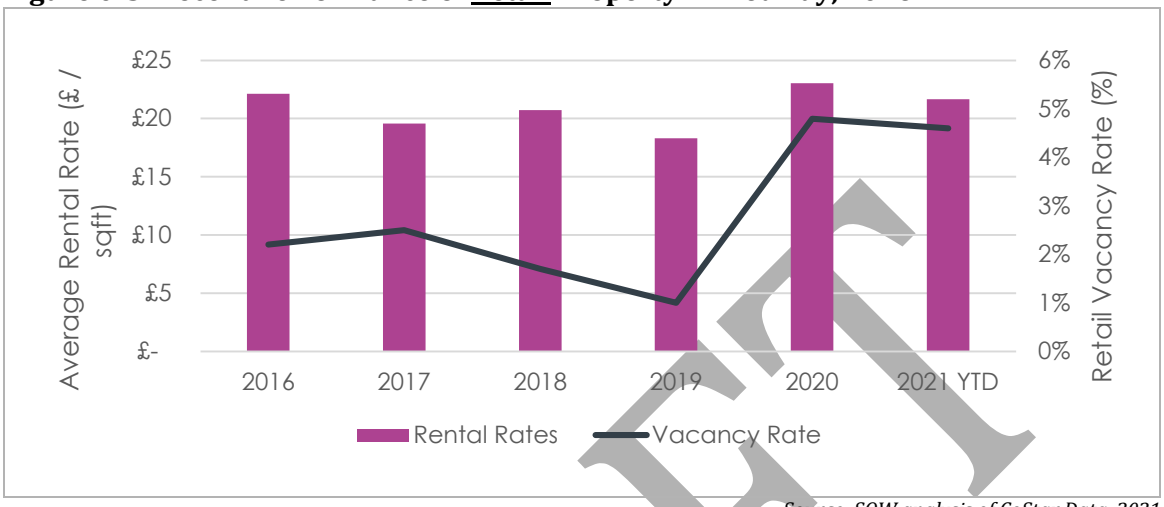
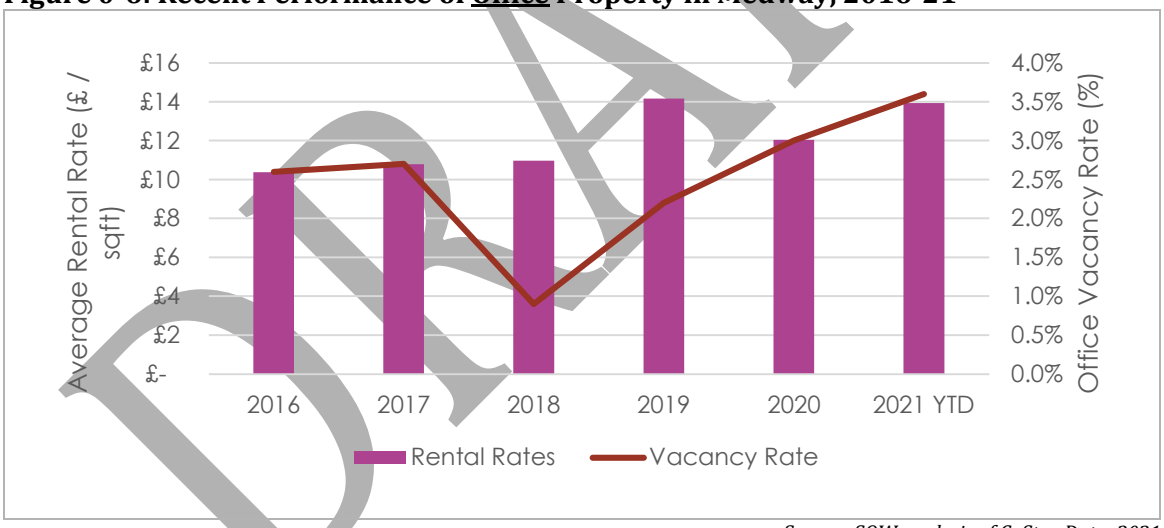
post June 2021 sits at c. 14%[7]; although vacancy rates are lower in, for example, Rochester. Rental values have fluctuated over the last five years, with rising office rents (of around 40%), whereas retail rents have remained relatively stable.

Figure 0-5: Recent Performance of Retail Property in Medway, 2016-21



Source: SQW analysis of CoStar Data, 2021

Figure 0-6: Recent Performance of Office Property in Medway, 2016-21



Source: SQW analysis of CoStar Data, 2021

In summary, the picture for the commercial market across Medway is one of increasing high street and retail vacancy but with an increasingly strong office market, reflecting the increasing diversification of Medway's town centres.

Insights from engagement with local stakeholders

In developing this Town Centres Strategy, a range of engagement has been undertaken with stakeholders actively involved in Medway's town centres. Although there were a wide range of perspectives on the town centres, there were a number of overarching themes:

[7] Centre for Cities High Street Recovery Tracker – accessed 21 February 2022

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- Medway's town centres need to think and provide uses and services beyond retail – community, cultural, pop-up/creative, food and drink, leisure and entertainment, and workspaces. The old shopping-centric model isn't working any more.
- Community-led initiatives are critical to the success of our town centres – these need to be empowered and resourced so they are able to help support the vibrancy and vitality of our town centres
- Each of Medway's town centres has a unique heritage and identity that needs to be reflected through the Town Centres Strategy – beyond just focusing on the well-known heritage assets, projects like the Chatham Intra Heritage Action Zone cultural consortium are doing a great job of revealing and celebrating Medway's lesser-known heritage.
- But they also need to come together to 'help each other' and promote Medway as a place to live, work, learn and visit.
- There are important agendas which must be reflected in a new Town Centres Strategy, including net-zero, child-friendly and innovation.
- Medway should celebrate and promote success and reverse the negative reputation some of the town centres have.
- Gillingham town centre has experienced a prolonged decline, and action/investment needs to be secured to reverse its fortunes.
- Creative industries, arts and culture play an important role already across Medway but there is a real opportunity for these uses to play a more visible role across Medway's town centres, particularly in looking to build on the legacy of the City of Culture bid.
- Business rates are a challenge for town centre uses, particularly cultural/creative type uses in a high-street setting.
- The evening and night-time economy of Medway's town centres needs significant improvement – there is little reason to visit once the shops close in some town centres, for example, there aren't many places for university students to go in the evenings in Gillingham and Chatham. There are lots of new homes being planned and built in and near Medway's town centres so it will be important to also deliver the leisure and F&B spaces and places for new and existing residents.
- Medway's town centres feel relatively disconnected from the river – it would be great to see improved secure and safe links.
- There are a number of organisations already delivering projects, programmes, operating spaces and engaging with communities – they would love to collaborate more closely with the council to increase their reach and deliver even more (i.e., Nucleus Arts; Ideas Test; Sun Pier House – all in Chatham and Rochester).

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Ambitions within Medway's Town Centres

The emerging Medway Local Plan[8] has ambitions to actively create sustainable, healthy centres, and support the regeneration of the council's existing town centres. The focus should be on creating child-friendly, sustainable and accessible centres for people to reconnect, use for day-to-day purposes and enjoy throughout the day and night. Centres should be injected with the required fundamental main town centre uses and residential to support sustainable town centre living and reducing the need to travel. Planning decisions for town centres will support the ambitions to provide the following alongside a growing population:

- Retail provision directed to Medway's centres with comparison goods retailing directed to the larger centres and new convenience goods retail provided in existing and new centres.
- The potential to deliver community, tourism, culture, leisure and food and beverage uses in town centres must be explored thoroughly as sequentially preferable.
- In-centre and edge of centre locations will also be explored for further provision of employment uses outside of designated employment areas.

To support the development of Medway's town centres, three separate masterplans were commissioned for Chatham, Gillingham and Strood in 2019. These all provided a long-term vision for each town centre, including development opportunities, a strategic focus and vision and list of actions. The table below summarises the key recommendations made for each town centre.

Masterplans Developed for Medway's Town Centres

Town Centre	Key Recommendations from Masterplan
Chatham	• Enhance connectivity between the town centre and the riverfront. • Revealing heritage in the town: provide new connections and enhance existing connections between the Great Lines Heritage Park and the Chatham town centre. Better use of the historic assets within the town centre and Great Lines Heritage Park. • Reinforce and support creative clusters: supporting their organic growth in Chatham, and co-locate land uses alongside these clusters which complement their activities. Increase the visibility of creative clusters within the High Street. • Create a cohesive and legible active transport network: with the pedestrian and cycle networks well connected to key locations in the town centre. • Diversify economic drivers across the town centre: provide space for new economic sectors and key anchor tenants, as well as working with key Medway civic and education institutions to find opportunities within existing and new buildings..

[8] Note that the Medway Local Plan has not been adopted, the latest version is available to view here: (Public Pack)Supplementary Agenda No.1 Agenda Supplement for Council, 07/10/2021 19:30 (medway.gov.uk)

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Town Centre	Key Recommendations from Masterplan
	• Unlock the potential of opportunity sites: work with stakeholders and landowners to bring forward new development sites. Deliver early public domain and landscape improvements in conjunction with new development.
Gillingham	• Extend the retail core boundary to include Aldi, the Balmoral Health Centre and Marlborough Road. • Potential for the market to grow and evolve to become more much of an anchor for the town centre. • Create a place for civic or community events around 'Smith Square.' • Enhancements to the quality of the public environment needed through improved cleaning and maintenance routines. • Improve high street public realm and wayfinding. • Better signage and enforcement of vehicular access to High Street. • Improve town centre access and offer for students living close to town centre. • Feasibility study on parking to understand impact on town centre.
Strood	• Understand current car parking capacity and develop a strategy for this. • Enhance pedestrian and cycle networks, including to the waterfront. • Improve the public transport network, particularly around Strood Railway Station. • Create a network of green spaces that raise the profile of St Nicholas Church Gardens and connect these to the River Medway. • Enhance shopfronts through an improvement programme. • Intensify the use of the arches and improve their setting. • Deliver new residential and mixed-use development to support town centre offer.

The recommendations highlighted remain broadly relevant to this Town Centres Strategy and have informed the approach set out below.

In order to survive and thrive in the future, Medway's town centres will need to look and function very differently to how they do today. Medway's town centres will need to be more than just places to visit the shops; they need to diversify and become places to eat, drink, relax, work, innovate, celebrate, live and come together as a community. Medway's town centres are already home to many entrepreneurial, innovative, community-focused and creative businesses, social enterprises, charities and artists: this strategy aims to catalyse this continued diversification.

The future of our town centres will celebrate all that is already unique and distinctive about each of our individual places whilst embracing change and providing space for a range of uses to come to our high streets; uses which will be rooted in the communities of Medway providing something for everyone through delivering diversity rather than a 'one size fits all' approach.

During this period Medway Council has been successful in attracting Levelling Up Fund, Future High Streets Fund and High Street Heritage Action Zone funding to invest in its town

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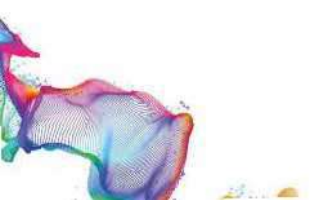

centres; many of these funded projects are underway and will be integral in diversifying our town centres.

These funded projects include:

- Investment in renovating and repurposing heritage assets, creation of a framework to guide future development in the area, business support and community engagement (High Street Heritage Action Zone Funding)

- A cultural programme including footfall generating events and heritage education led by a new 'arms-length' cultural consortium (High Street Heritage Action Zone Cultural Programme Funding)

- Securing funding to deliver an innovative adult learning, skills and employment hub in Gillingham through repurposing the Britton Farm Mall (Getting Building Fund).

- Proposed delivery of a health and wellbeing hub, innovation hub, mixed-use conversion of the former Debenhams building and creation of a community workspace in Chatham Town Centre (Future High Street Fund).

- Proposed delivery of a range of cultural and creative industries-focused workspace projects at The Brook Theatre and The Historic Dockyard Chatham alongside key partners (Levelling Up Fund).

Various residential projects are also planned or underway in Chatham, including Mountbatten House, the former Debenhams building and the Trafalgar Centre and NCP Car Park which will increase the residential population and increase footfall and local expenditure, further diversifying Chatham town centre.

However, these projects are just the start. The council also recognises that there has been a particular focus of regeneration projects in recent years in Chatham, Rochester and Strood. The priority is now on unlocking the potential of each of Medway's town centres and this will require a combination of leadership, visioning, common purpose, public investment, and resources working in partnership with local residents, entrepreneurs, businesses, and community groups.

Working together we can identify the challenges, define the opportunities and co-create transformational projects – large and small – which the Medway communities want to see delivered.

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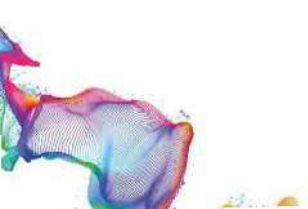

Why are Medway's town centres important?

Town centres are critical to the success of Medway's economy and towns. They are a focal point for Medway's communities, culture and everyday economies. They support the most sustainable models of living and working, including active travel and shorter commutes. And they are where new ideas, ways of living, businesses and experiences are made.

However, the national and local evidence detailed above shows that Medway's town centres face many challenges, which impact on their performance, and ability to meet the needs of the populations of Medway that they serve and those visiting Medway.

Making Medway's town centres thriving places will be critical for the future prosperity of the wider area. It is necessary to provide the spaces and places for businesses to thrive, communities to come together and support each other, and beacons for Medway's heritage, culture and sustainability. Evidence shows that having strong town centres can unlock a wide range of benefits:

- Supporting health and wellbeing of our wider communities, reducing health and social inequalities.
- Creating strong businesses and employment opportunities across a range of uses and sectors.
- Providing opportunities and raising awareness for learning new skills and aspirational careers.
- Supporting an innovation culture that improves productivity.
- Delivering genuinely mixed-use places where housing is an important component can generate activity, community and footfall.
- Supporting a more sustainable economy through the creative re-use of existing assets and supporting a diverse, local business community which can encourage reduced car usage.
- Creating and maintaining attractive town centre spaces and places can improve perceptions and boost civic pride.

Town centres have always evolved and changed, responding to societal, economic, cultural and technological drivers which is why they remain so important. Whilst we cannot predict precisely what the future will look like, the only certainty is that the need to change and evolve will continue.

In order for Medway's town centres to survive and thrive, it is not enough just to react to the existing situation, it is also important to build in future resilience and support adaptability in the face of structural factors including the transition to net zero, the unfolding impacts of Covid-19 and technological transformation.

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SWOT Analysis

Each of Medway's town centres has an inherited legacy of assets, uses and stakeholders positioned in their own unique locational and socio-economic context. Whilst there are some themes which apply to all of the town centres, each has its own strengths and weaknesses which, consequently, means that the potential opportunities and threats are also distinctive.

Each of Medway's town centres is analysed below separately, in recognition of their differences, in order to frame the approach and initiatives which follow.

Chatham

Chatham Town Centre is a sustainable waterfront town with city scale infrastructure and is the main centre within the network of well-connected centres in very close proximity to one another making ambitions of sustainable travel and city living possible. Chatham is the geographic centre of Medway and has a population of nearly 80,000. It has a busy high-street, albeit with increasing levels of retail vacancy, and its character is enriched by the unique heritage assets of The Historic Dockyard, Fort Amherst and the green backdrop of Great Lines Heritage Park.

Chatham has been successful in recent years at attracting public sector investment into the town, with recent Future High Streets Fund and Levelling Up Fund bids bringing new investment into the town to complement major ongoing waterfront residential-led developments which are underway and smaller-scale interventions and projects being delivered by a range of local organisations and entrepreneurs. The future challenge is to build on this investment, attract further investment and maximise opportunities to develop assets and spaces to enhance the visitor experience and thus strengthen the city centre offer.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Strong heritage and distinctiveness of place. • Strong emerging creative sector. • New bus interchange, and improved public realm and way finding from railway station into centre. • Nearby universities and Further Education provision • Primary centre with largest amount of retail stores (408 units) and total floor space of 76,300sqm. • Within walking distance of the waterfront and open space along it and the train station. • Within close proximity of the Great Lines. • Great Lines backdrop and view of the waterfront.	• There is a lack of identity/branding for the town centre, with no focal point. • Few high-quality anchor stores. • Less representation of larger national retailers. relative to other town centre of a similar size nationally. • Safety is a major concern for local people, with high levels of anti-social behaviour impacting on pride of place and social deprivation. • Long-term vacant units. • Limited leisure and evening economy offer. • Stakeholders are not satisfied with the transport system; buses are not reliable; the roads are congested, and multi-modal interchange is difficult. • Appearance of shops/facades. • Homelessness. • Limited connection with the river/waterfront. • Lack of appeal to younger people, including students.

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Opportunities	Threats
• Council owned property redevelopment (mixed use schemes). • Investment through successful Future High Streets Fund and Levelling Up Fund bids. • Re-configuration and better use of car parking sites to assist town centre development. • Work with landlords of vacant properties to bring into productive use. • Grow creative sector and social capital. • Diversify the town centre offer through expanded high street uses – culture/arts, workspace, community, food and beverageand leisure. • Large sites have been identified within the town centre that can accommodate integrated mix and affordable housing. • Improve public realm of High Street. • Consider developing new international food themed street market. • Build on events/place-making programme to change perception of the city centre. • Attract hotel brands to support 'city break' economy. • Enhance connections between town centre and the waterfront.	• Competition from other centres– Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre, competing centres in neighbouring authorities and out-of-town centre locations. • Online shopping, changing retailer models and changing consumer patterns. • Affordability of public transport and car parking. • The better financial return/investment and need for more residential and less retail.

Rochester

Rochester town centre is well known for its heritage, leisure, independent retail and cultural offer drawing on custom beyond the local population. Rochester is currently the principal focus of Medway's visitor economy. Rochester Castle and cathedral define the town centre, which boasts a vibrant mix of independent retailers, alongside an excellent restaurant and café offer. Rochester is home to many of Medway's most successful festivals and events and has a thriving tourist economy (for instance, more than 283,000 people visited Rochester Cathedral pre-Covid in 2019; additionally, more than 200,000 people visited the Dickensian Christmas Festival and Christmas Market in December 2021, 50,000 more than in 2019). It hosts a popular monthly farmers' market and artisan market.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Strong heritage, tourism destinations and distinctiveness of place. • Iconic castle and cathedral adjacent to the town centre. The castle grounds and the high street tend to be host to many cultural events, festivals and concerts. • Strong restaurant and café culture with boutique shops and limited chains. • Strong footfall and weekend activity although noting seasonal dimension to footfall and the importance of events in driving this. • Farmers Market and Artisan Market.	• Anti-social behaviour in evenings. • Limited car parking in relation to popularity, the frequency and number of visits made – principally during events. • Busy through route – Corporation Street and across Rochester Bridge. • Older format of units – less flexible to change to address modern retailer requirements. • Shops entrances tend to be location for the homeless. • Evening economy accompanied by anti-social behaviour.

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• Smaller sized units reflective of historic character of the district centre. • Iconic and historic Rochester Bridge. • Limited high street vacancies. • Many edge-of-centre sites coming forward for development or being developed. • Strong events programme.	• Narrow pavements in some areas limit outdoor café culture opportunities.
Opportunities • Opportunity sites to enhance arrival point and expand the offer (hotels, start-up employment units) to support culture and tourism. • Opportunity sites on edge of centre to deliver more housing. • Support successful cultural/arts events programme. • Potential for capital investment to align with Rochester Castle 900-year anniversary. • Walking distance of waterfront with esplanade and children's play area – but poorly signed and could be improved.	**Threats** • Online shopping, changing retailer models and changing consumer patterns. • The better financial return/investment and need for more residential and less retail. • The busy vehicular through-route and insufficient car parking during busy periods reduces the attractiveness. • Anti-social behaviour is a threat to the health of the evening economy.

Strood

Strood Town Centre is known as a convenience retail destination and performs a local function. Being the first train stop in Medway, Strood offers a greater potential to become a more attractive destination of choice with great travel links. Lying adjacent to the town centre is a large edge-of-centre retail park. At present, the retail park is a significant attractor of visits to the town, although it has a less than ideal relationship with the core part of the town centre.

The town centre is compact with multiple shops, supermarkets and convenience stores, and a market and thriving retail park. A significant amount of developable land within the town centre is within Medway Council's control. This will be redeveloped to intensify residential and employment land usage around the town centre and to increase town centre footfall opportunities.

Strengths • Preferred location for supermarket shopping – four major supermarkets located in and on the edge of the town centre. • Complementary retail offer in the retail park across the street from the high street. • Supports employment areas on the edge of the centre.	**Weaknesses** • A very vehicle dominated town centre with high levels of traffic congestion. • Commercial Road splits the heart of the town and this is exacerbated by the two car parks on either side of the road and the lack of attractive shop frontages. • Large quantity of lower value retailers. • Limited high street offer and lack of synergy with retail park. • Limited/no high-end retailers. • Struggling vitality and vibrancy. • Poor quality shop appearances/facades. • Poor connection with the river/waterfront.

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Opportunities • Opportunities articulated within the Strood Masterplan for substantial residential and commercial development in and around the town centre. • Proximity of the town centre to the waterfront, and views across to Rochester need to be better exploited, including through increased public access along the waterfront. • Railway arches provide an opportunity to intensify uses.	**Threats** • Competition from other centres - including in neighbouring authorities and out-of-town centre locations. • Online shopping, changing retailer models and changing consumer patterns. • Traffic congestion/increase in traffic because of further anticipated growth. • Pressure on infrastructure, services and facilities.

Gillingham

Gillingham Town Centre performs a local function, catering for the needs of residents within its catchment. It provides sustainably accessed community facilities and services and a food market necessary to cater for day-to day needs. Gillingham is the proud home of the Royal School of Military Engineering and more than 10,000 university students and is an increasingly popular location for families. It is also home to Kent's only league football club, Gillingham Football Club. Gillingham is also home to Medway Maritime Hospital (the largest in Kent) and vital for future healthcare for Medway's residents and for offering multiple training and career opportunities.

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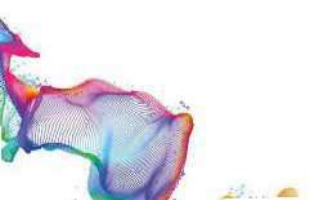
Strengths • High Street largely meets local needs. • Newly enhanced railway station on edge of the centre. • Well serviced by buses. • Strong Monday and Saturday street markets.	**Weaknesses** • Recent closure of national retailers (e.g., WHSmith) and lower representation of nationally recognised retailers. • High Street is 'too long.' • Ageing retail infrastructure and buildings. • Struggling vitality and vibrancy. • Poor public realm and appearance of shop facades. • Homelessness. • Anti-social behaviour.
Opportunities • Council owned property redevelopment (mixed use schemes) e.g., Britton Farm Mall. • Work with landlords of vacant properties to bring into productive use. • New student and resident footfall from housing developments. • Improve public realm of High Street. • Build on events/place-making programme. • Change perception of the district centre. • Create evening economy, support commercial leisure offers and diversify retail leisure offer. • Develop creative industries/cultural offer to activate and diversify the high street. • Develop and strengthen street markets.	**Threats** • Competition from other centres - including neighbouring authorities and out-of-town centre locations, particularly Gillingham Retail Park and Tesco. • Online shopping, changing retailer models and changing consumer patterns. • Competing retail in close proximity - along Canterbury Street, Chatham Waters, Strand.



Rainham

Rainham shopping centre provides for the local community with a compact and popular retail area serving local needs. Most development opportunities are on the periphery, towards the border with Swale. The aim is to ensure that new residents consider Rainham as their local centre, and encourage the significant new population planned for the edge of Rainham and Swale to visit Rainham for their retail and leisure needs, increasing visitor spend and footfall.

Strengths • Amongst the smallest of the town centres. • Appears to be functioning well. • Benefits from a strong performing anchor store (Tesco). • Low vacancy rates. • Presence of multiple retailers.	**Weaknesses** • Lack of unit space to accommodate future growing population of Rainham. • Lack of comparison goods offer and need for a wider mix of retailers. • Anti-social behaviour. • Aged public realm.
Opportunities • Improve public realm. • Reconfigure the public square in the shopping centre to create a meeting/events space by removing and repositioning items of street furniture • New resident footfall from housing developments. • Work with shopping centre tenants and operators to look at future for Rainham Shopping Centre and possible expansion of centre.	**Threats** • Competition from other centres including neighbouring authorities and out-of-town centre locations. • Online shopping, changing retailer models and changing consumer patterns. • Traffic congestion/increase in traffic as a result of further anticipated growth. • Pressure on infrastructure, services and facilities.

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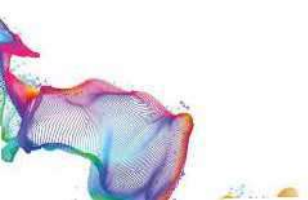

A Town Centres Strategy for Medway

Our approach

Having analysed each town centre, reviewed the evidence and undertaken engagement with a range of stakeholders within and external to Medway Council, a strategy has been developed comprising of an organising vision and key overarching priorities.

To deliver the change everyone wants to see in our town centres and realise some of the potential benefits, a vision for each individual town centre has been developed with our partners along with an overarching vision for all town centres. Fundamentally, Medway Council will aim to support the delivery of change in each of town centres with principles of *growth for all, innovation,* and *net zero transition* embedded at the heart of this transformation, aligned with the ambition of *Medway 2037*.

The vision(s) are both informed by, and frame, key priorities for delivering change.

To support the delivery of the Medway Town Centres Strategy and associated vision(s) a Town Centres Delivery Plan will be co-designed and developed with key partners and stakeholders to identify a range of potential projects and initiatives.

Our vision for Medway's town centres

The vision for Medway's Town Centres

To create a prosperous, attractive, vibrant and sustainable waterfront city centre for Chatham and the town centres of Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham in complementary, unique ways that embrace distinctiveness and enable growth for all.

To create diverse, inclusive, demand-led shopping, leisure, living and working environments and experiences for residents and visitors; support businesses to flourish, create, innovate, and enable an increasingly productive economy alongside improvements in the quality of life for Medway's residents.

Chatham

Chatham is the city centre at the heart of Medway with its own powerful and distinctive identity, building on Chatham's local community, river-setting and heritage assets. As Medway's primary city centre, its role extends beyond just serving the local community, but

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it should look attract to visitors from across Medway and neighbouring areas, by creating an attractive city centre environment, accommodating a burgeoning evening economy and hosting events and festivals to attract people into the town. Chatham should:

- Be a ***place and platform*** for Medway, where Medway's communities, heritage and culture are celebrated. Chatham should become an advertisement for Medway, showcasing creative and cultural activities, events and the strength of our communities.
- Be a ***fun, child-friendly and safe place***, attracting people into the city centre with a series of events and festivals hosted in inclusive public spaces and making the most of stronger connections to the Waterfront and the Great Lines Heritage Park.
- Be a place where ***all of Medway's communities can come together***, including our students, businesses, educational institutions and residents.
- Be a ***place of innovation*** where diverse occupiers occupy and enliven the centre, hosting workspaces, galleries, 'pop-up' uses, restaurants, entertainment venues and community hubs to complement the town centre's existing retail uses.

Enhancing the linkage between Chatham to the dockyard, waterfront and Chatham Intra areas is important: these connections should be developed in order to support the growth of the creative and cultural sectors across the town.

Rochester

Rochester's town centre is in relatively good health, and its heritage, independent retail, leisure and cultural offer continues to draw people into the town, despite the effects of the pandemic. Rochester's unique offer should be reinforced.

The town should look to build on its role as the lead town for the tourism in Medway, becoming a beacon nationally for creative and cultural events, the night-time economy and promoting the diversity of activity taking place across the area. It should look to continue and build on its current events programme, attracting more people into the town in the future and supporting the wider economy across Medway. Opportunities should be explored to celebrate the forthcoming 900-year anniversary of Rochester Castle. The evening economy should continue to be supported, particularly extending the early evening economy into the later evening, along with a focus on ensuring an inclusive and accessible offer and environment for residents and visitors.

Strood

Strood town centre is a convenience retail destination and has a retail park adjacent to the town centre. It should look to reinforce this role by ensuring that the substantial residential and mixed-use development, which is expected to take place in the town, helps support the town centre and brings more footfall and opportunities into the area.

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To support the vibrancy of the town centre, Strood should look to embrace its heritage, reconnect itself with the riverfront, take advantage of its strong connectivity to London and the competitive advantage this brings to the town (i.e. encouraging residential community on riverfront sites and using signage/legibility upgrades to promote use of town centre), and make the town a more attractive place to live, work and shop – for instance softening the public realm with more integrated, green spaces.

Gillingham

Gillingham is currently in need of the most substantial investment of Medway's town centres to support the vitality and sustainability of the high street. Gillingham plays an important role in serving its local community, including significant recent waterfront developments, and is the centre closest to the Royal School of Military Engineering and universities. However, the gradual decline of the high street has made it a less welcoming place for people to visit and the offer within the town is starting to reflect this decline, with major retailers pulling out of the town centre.

Despite this decline, there is a real opportunity within Gillingham to provide for local residents. Community needs and aspirations will be front and centre of identifying creative and innovative uses to re-activate the high street. There are opportunities to diversify and enhance the offer, improve the public realm and fabric of the high street, improve accessibility, make the town centre a safer and more child-friendly place and look to celebrate its military heritage.

Rainham

Rainham town centre serves its local community, in terms of catchment, and it should continue to do this into the future. However, the mix of retail available in Rainham Shopping Centre currently is relatively limited and it also does not provide a meeting space for the community. There is an opportunity to provide a community focal point in Rainham Shopping Centre.

Rainham should be supported and enhanced so that it is in position to both serve local residents, but also encourage the significant new population planned for the edge of Rainham and Swale to visit Rainham for their retail and leisure needs. The growth of specialist independent retailers should be encouraged to act as unique attractors.

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How we get there: overarching priorities for Medway's town centres

To deliver on these visions, several key overarching priorities have been identified which provide the basis for future strategy delivery:

Take a place-based approach to delivery

Delivering successful town centres requires multi-disciplinary place-based thinking and delivery. This entails bringing together services across Medway Council to align policy and delivery priorities focused on places together with consideration of projects and interventions which cut across thematic lines.

Develop a strong vision and narrative that celebrates the individuality of each town centre, but that unites them under a common goal, which directly informs what is delivered

Understand the role of each town centre and its offer for Medway with actions which reflect this distinctiveness.

Challenge perceptions of our town centres to celebrate their individual characters, assets, businesses and communities to demonstrate that they are welcoming places for everyone.

The visions for each town centre set out above are a starting point, not an end in itself. These visions will be adapted and refined by the council working in partnership with stakeholders.

Balance pragmatism with aspiration

Identify projects and interventions at all scales – small-scale, short-term and with good prospects for delivery and larger-scale, longer-term projects which will require partnership working and funding to be delivered.

Capital funding intensive regeneration projects have their place. The 2019 masterplans for Chatham, Gillingham and Strood define a number of longer-term projects the council could look to deliver. These take time and are heavily reliant on the council securing third party public or private funding and delivery support. The council will continue to explore this potential but will also focus on enabling a larger number of smaller scale but creative, innovative and impactful interventions to deliver more immediate impacts, working closely with partners.

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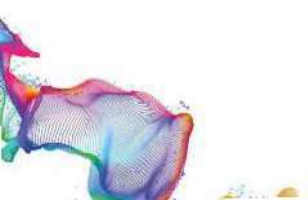

Support the growth and diversification of businesses in our town centres

Provide the right types of spaces and environments that are conducive to supporting business growth across a diverse range of sectors and uses.

Support businesses in adapting to new ways of working, new technology and the net-zero agenda.

Develop the supporting partnership structures needed to let our town centres flourish

Develop effective and meaningful relationships between the council, community groups and Town Centre Forums, to help them in partnership. co-design & co-deliver, facilitate, deliver and manage change in town centres.

The Old High Street Intra Cultural Consortium delivering the High Street Heritage Action Zone Cultural Programme is a great example of a partnership structure bringing together a range of charitable, community and cultural organisations, which has established itself and is proving effective in the delivery of a programme of projects. Medway Council has acted as a facilitator to support rather than direct. This model could be emulated with the Town Centre Forums.

Ensure that communities are genuinely engaged in this process to help shape and deliver change.

Recognise that the council has a number of 'levers' it can use to both directly deliver projects and initiatives, work in partnership with others in varying forms (resourcing, funding etc) in addition to building capacity of external stakeholders to deliver themselves.

Make town centres places that everyone can access and benefit from

Improve the safety of town centres, tackling concerns around crime and anti-social behaviour.

Make Medway's town centres child-friendly environments where young people feel safe, protected, valued and included.

This includes supporting the hospitality and night-time offer, encouraging more students and visitors to use our town centres.

Ensure our town centres respond to the net zero agenda and benefit from innovation

Provide high-quality pedestrian and cycle infrastructure and encourage more active methods of transport.

Support the creative re-use of existing built assets.

Encourage the digitalisation of our high streets and businesses.

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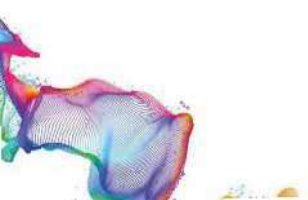

Support the delivery of improved outcomes for all of Medway's town centres

Build on the platform of recent successes in securing public funding and delivering transformational projects more focused around Chatham, Rochester and Strood to ensure that future delivery and investment is distributed.

Delivering the Medway Town Centres Strategy

To support the delivery of the Medway Town Centres Strategy and associated vision(s), a Town Centres Delivery Plan will be co-designed and developed with key partners and stakeholders to identify a range of potential projects and initiatives. These will build on, and respond to, changes across Medway, including projects already initiated following recent central Government funding awards. The projects will be a mix of long-term ambitious, aspirational, transformative initiatives as well as smaller initiatives with the potential to deliver immediate, visible changes. Some projects will focus on the infrastructure and governance required to support genuine partnership working and others will focus on physical interventions. The co-designed Medway Town Centres Delivery Plan will be regarded as a 'live document' and contingent upon funding availability and stakeholder support. Progress against delivery will be monitored and updated annually.

The Medway Town Centres Strategy and future co-designed Delivery Plan will not seek to duplicate or overlap with other areas where the council is delivering policies or programmes specific to town centres. For example, the council has developed a 'Roadmap' to guide its proposed projects and delivery of Smart Cities related projects. Many of these projects will be delivered in town centres. Similarly, there are a number of transport and highways projects being delivered in Medway's town centres. These projects are set out in other strategies and action plans. Rather than duplicate, the future Town Centres Delivery Plan will add value to existing strategies and delivery plans and have greater focus on economic development and regeneration related interventions. A multi-disciplinary working approach will be adopted within the council to ensure coordination and alignment between services to collectively work towards achieving the Town Centres Strategy and its vision.

Overarching interventions

To supporting discussion and the co-design process with stakeholders to create a Town Centres Delivery Plan, a programme of interlinked and complementary interventions and projects are proposed for consideration that would benefit all of Medway's town centres and which will generate specific projects and interventions at a town centre level.

Building partnerships - At the heart of the proposed Town Centres Delivery Plan is an emphasis on building the capacity and resilience of the Town Centre Forums (TCFs), with a focus on increasing and diversifying their membership, clarifying focus and purpose, identifying appropriate funding opportunities and delivering interventions. Medway Council recognises that the TCFs have the potential to play a critical role in delivering change in

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Medway's town centres. The most effective projects and programmes are those where Medway's businesses, communities, cultural and education providers have ownership as part of their design and delivery. The TCFs can potentially act as a key conduit for Medway Council engaging with all of these stakeholders in a town centre context, identifying the issues and supporting partners to deliver the change they want to see.

Unlocking innovation and diversification – to support initiatives that unlock innovation and diversification in Medway's town centres. This could include seeking investment to develop a potential town centres innovation fund and develop the meanwhile use strategy/toolkit and an evening economy strategy where the TCFs play a key role in design and delivery, with the council acting in a facilitating/supporting role. The focus of these linked interventions will be to unlock stakeholder ideas and initiatives which will diversify and enliven high streets rather than imposing a 'top down' programme of change. This approach will complement the council's existing programme of capital regeneration projects to deliver change in the short-medium term.

Celebrating culture and the arts – to explore the future provision and delivery of arts education and training in a town centre context, in response both to the pending departure of the University of the Creative Arts from Rochester and the strength of the arts and creative sectors in Medway. The council will support dialogue with key stakeholders to explore potential alternative models for delivery of arts education, with a focus on making these uses visible in Medway's town centres to activate and rejuvenate as well as educate.

Activating with markets and events – to adopt a 'joined up' council and stakeholder approach to events management and delivery across Medway's town centres, inclusive of cultural and heritage events and Medway's markets.

Supporting accessibility and inclusivity – to prioritise the coordination and delivery of interventions that support active and sustainable travel and improvements to the existing street environment including cleaning and targeted enhancements to ensure that Medway's town centres are attractive, inclusive and accessible places.

Prioritising net zero – to explore opportunities to deliver environmentally sustainable retrofits and building repurposing where feasible to deliver the net zero agenda.

Town-specific interventions

The future co-designed Town Centre Delivery Plan will also identify a number of more focused town specific projects and initiatives. Medway Council will facilitate the co-design process.

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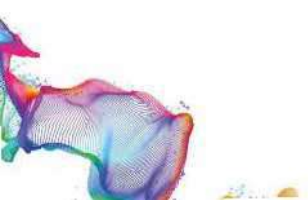
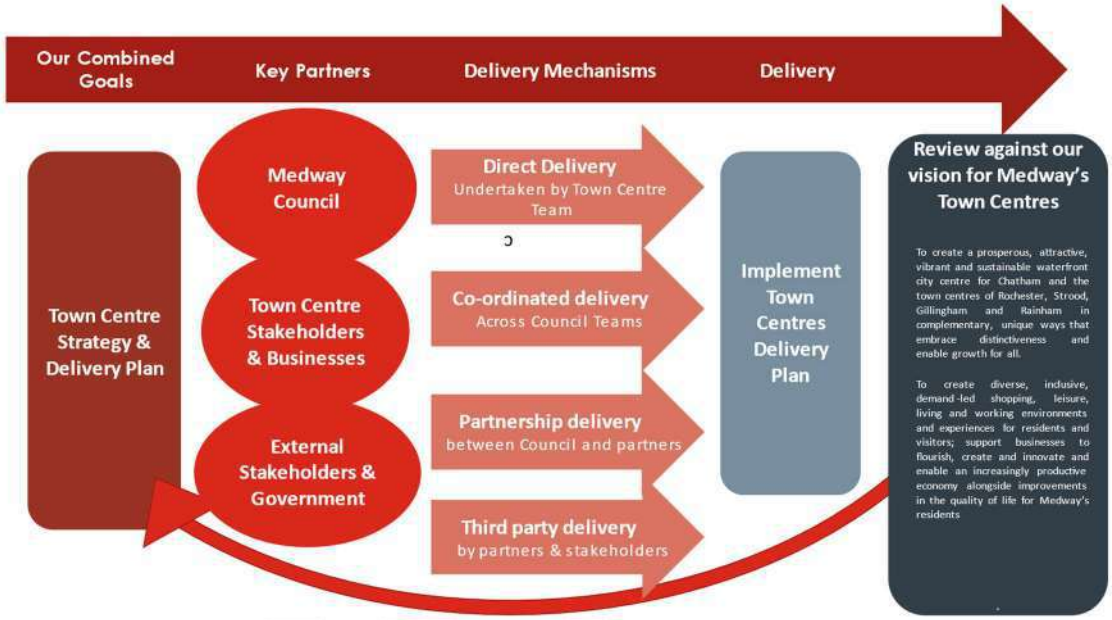


Implementation

Figure 1-1 outlines the approach to implementation of the Medway Town Centres Strategy.

The future success of Medway's town centres will be contingent upon a number of key factors; accordingly, Medway Council will make the following commitments to delivering transformational change in its town centres:

Figure 0-1: Our Delivery Approach


Our Combined Goals
Key Partners
Delivery Mechanisms
Delivery
Town Centre Strategy & Delivery Plan
Medway Council
Town Centre Stakeholders & Businesses
External Stakeholders & Government
Direct Delivery
Undertaken by Town Centre Team
Co-ordinated delivery
Across Council Teams
Partnership delivery
between Council and partners
Third party delivery
by partners & stakeholders
Implement Town Centres Delivery Plan
Review against our vision for Medway's Town Centres
To create a prosperous, attractive, vibrant and sustainable waterfront city centre for Chatham and the town centres of Rochester, Strood, Gillingham and Rainham in complementary, unique ways that embrace distinctiveness and enable growth for all.
To create diverse, inclusive, demand-led shopping, leisure, living and working environments and experiences for residents and visitors; support businesses to flourish, create and innovate and enable an increasingly productive economy alongside improvements in the quality of life for Medway's residents

Source: SQW

- Strong local leadership and advocacy – the council has identified its town centres as one of its central six priorities in its core economic development and regeneration strategy *Medway 2037* and it will play a leading role in advocating for and delivering change.
- Accountability – Medway Council has established a Town Centres Cabinet Advisory Board bringing together Members and officers to work together in delivering, and monitoring the progress of, this Town Centres Strategy.
- Medway Council resourcing – In order to deliver on its aspirations Medway Council will explore opportunities to enhance its resourcing to deliver on its own initiatives and support external stakeholders in building capacity to deliver in partnership.
- Cross-silo working – Medway Council will instigate cross-silo working with a town centres focused officer working group bringing together multiple services to take a place-based approach to coordination of delivery.
- Effective partnership working – successful town centres do not rely on top-down delivery by the public sector, but instead are the product of effective partnerships at

all stages (design, planning, funding, delivery and operation). Partnership working is embedded in this Town Centres Strategy, including a focus on creating meaningful forums for the exchange of ideas, co-design, development, implementation and monitoring of projects.

- Capacity building – the council recognises that there are a wealth of individuals and organisations which could deliver transformational change in its town centres. However, it recognises that some of these are under-funded and lacking resource. The council will work to support the enhanced capacity of some of these key stakeholders.
- Creativity – Medway is fortunate to be home to so many creative residents, businesses, entrepreneurs and community groups. We want to celebrate and empower these people, help them design, and deliver creative, exciting, 'uniquely Medway' initiatives to transform their town centres.

The successful delivery of these commitments will require Medway Council to secure and allocate sufficient funding and resources within what is a challenging public funding context for all local authorities. This highlights the importance of partnership working, including identifying opportunities for leveraging in private sector funding and support. However, as a minimum these commitments define how the council will strive to implement its agenda for transformational change in its town centres, recognising that the implementation of this Strategy and its Delivery Plan will need to flexibly respond to changing circumstances in the future.

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